



Climate Change and Older Americans

Presented by:

Michael McGeehin, PhD, MSPH



Population Vulnerability to Climate Change

Three Components:

- **Threat Exposure**
- **Population Characterization**
- **Adaptive Capacity**

Older Americans

Good News:

Older Americans are living longer and are enjoying greater prosperity than any previous generation

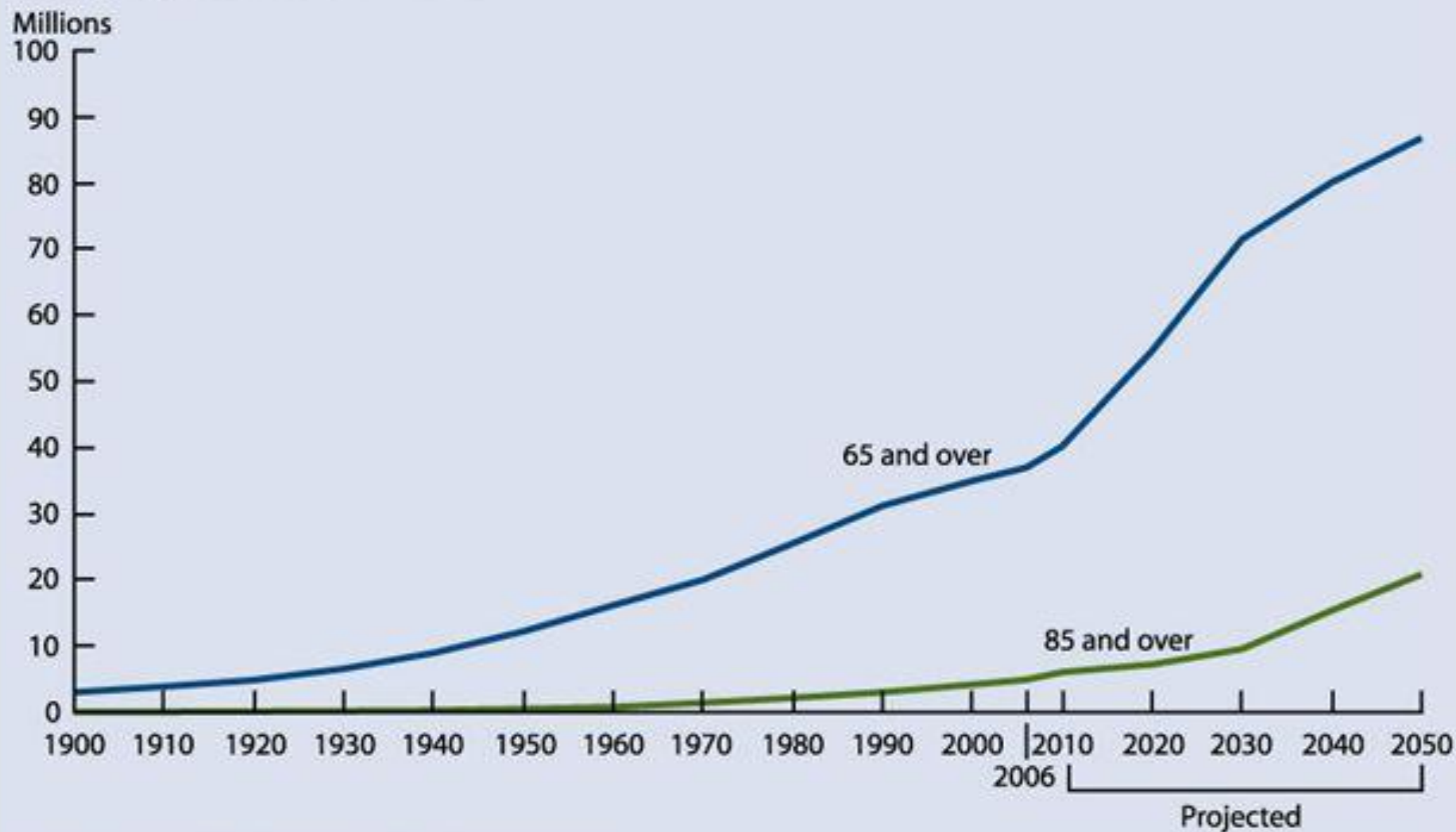
Bad News:

Older Americans suffer great health and income disparities by race, gender, and age

Growing Numbers

- 2000 – Older Americans numbered 35 million
- 2050 – Older Americans estimated at 80 million
- 2000 – Oldest Americans (> 85 years) number 5 million
- 2050 – Oldest Americans estimated at 19 million

Number of people age 65 and over, by age group, selected years 1900–2006 and projected 2010–2050



Note: Data for 2010–2050 are projections of the population.

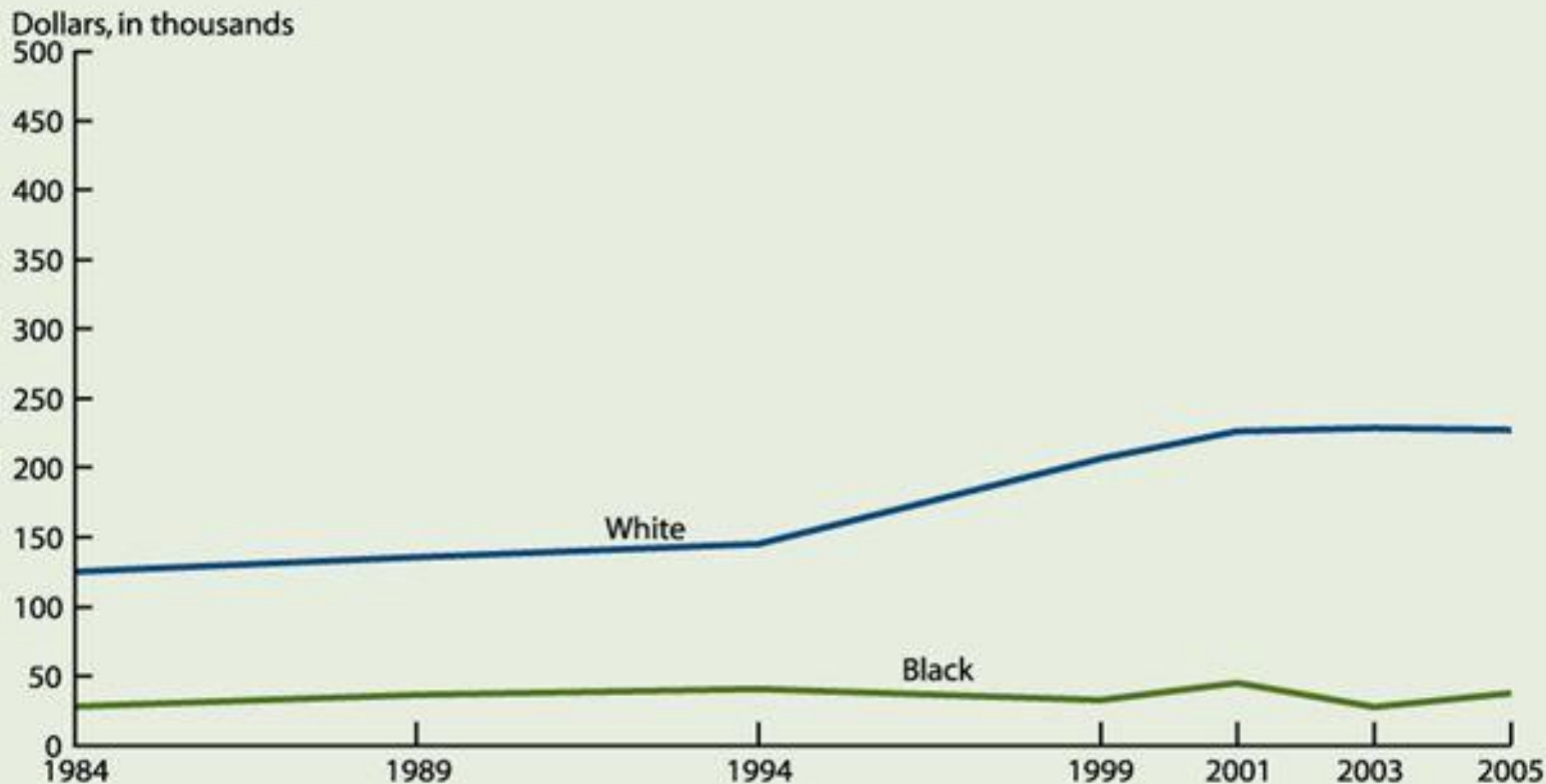
Reference population: These data refer to the resident population.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, Population Estimates and Projections.

Older Americans

- Older Americans are not a single, homogeneous group
- Differ by gender, race, and culture
- Oldest Old differ markedly from the younger age group (65-74 year)

Median household net worth, by race of head of household age 65 and over, in 2005 dollars, selected years 1984–2005



Note: Net worth data do not include pension wealth. This excludes private defined-contribution and defined-benefit plans as well as rights to Social Security wealth. Data for 1984–2003 have been inflation adjusted to 2005 dollars. See Appendix B for the definition of race and Hispanic origin in the Panel Study of Income Dynamics.

Reference population: These data refer to the civilian noninstitutionalized population.

Source: Panel Study of Income Dynamics.

Older American Profile (65-74 years)

- More diverse – proportion of non-white will double by 2050
- Healthy – 75% report health as “good” or better
- Only 1% reside in nursing facility
- Whites – dramatic income increase in last 4 decades
- Racial disparities – income, access to health care, chronic disease, limitations

Oldest Old Profile

- **Most rapidly growing group**
- **Higher percentage of poor or near-poor (20% vs. 11%)**
- **Require assistance with everyday activities (50% vs. 10%)**
- **More women living alone (57% vs. 32%)**
- **More institutional supportive care (25% vs. 1%)**
- **Less mobile**

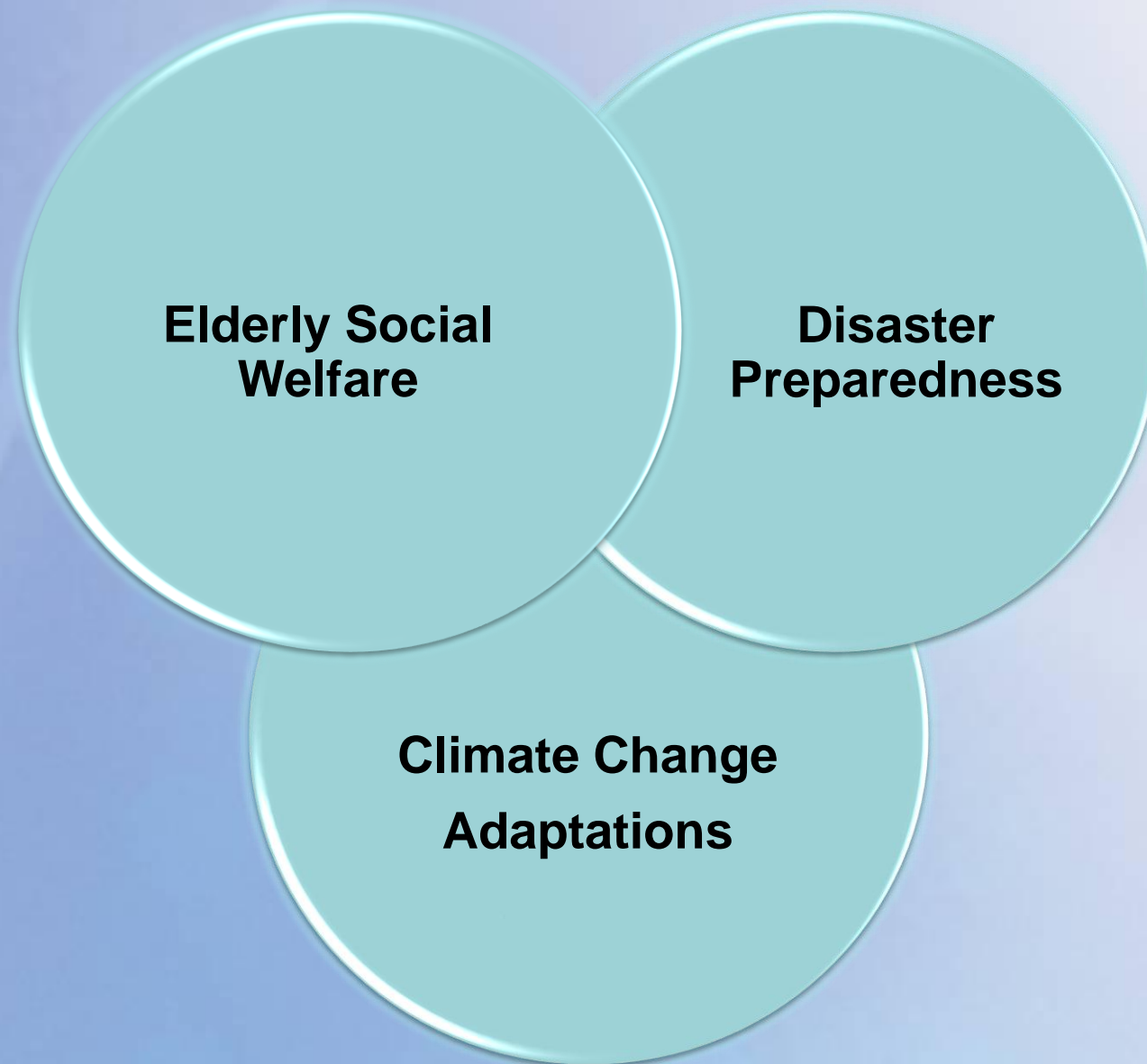
Tomorrow's Older Americans (Baby Boomers)

- More elderly
- More educated
- More diverse
- More affluent
- Higher proportion of “Oldest Old”
- Triple the number requiring nursing home care (1990-2030)

Older Americans Health Concerns

- Cause of death: heart disease, cancer, stroke (70%)
- Since 1980, 65 year old men have gained about 2 years of life
- Impacted ADL and IADL – decreasing proportions over last 3 decades
- Increasing prevalence of diabetes, orthopedic problems, heart disease, cancer
- Obesity prevalence increasing 0.5% each year for last 25 years

Climate Change Preparedness and the Elderly



Climate Change Impacts and Older American's Sensitivity

Climate Event	Impact	Likelihood	Elderly Sensitivity
Heat Waves	Heat stress and mortality	Very likely	Very sensitive
Extreme Precipitation	Contaminated water and food; drowning	Very likely	Very sensitive
Hurricanes	Drowning; injuries; flood impacts	Likely in coastal areas	Very sensitive
Air Pollution	Cardiovascular and pulmonary incidents	Likely in urban centers	Very sensitive
Rising T and Precipitation	Vectorborne disease spread	Likely	Sensitive

SOCIAL WELFARE

is concerned with the well being of members of our society, not just the standard of living or health but the overall quality of life.

Conclusions

- **Older Americans will grow in number and proportion**
- **Older Americans are a diverse and complicated subpopulation**
- **Older Americans are sensitive to many of the health risks posed by climate change**
- **Oldest old represent a particularly high risk group**
- **Adaptations and plans will need to account for this group as a high priority**